

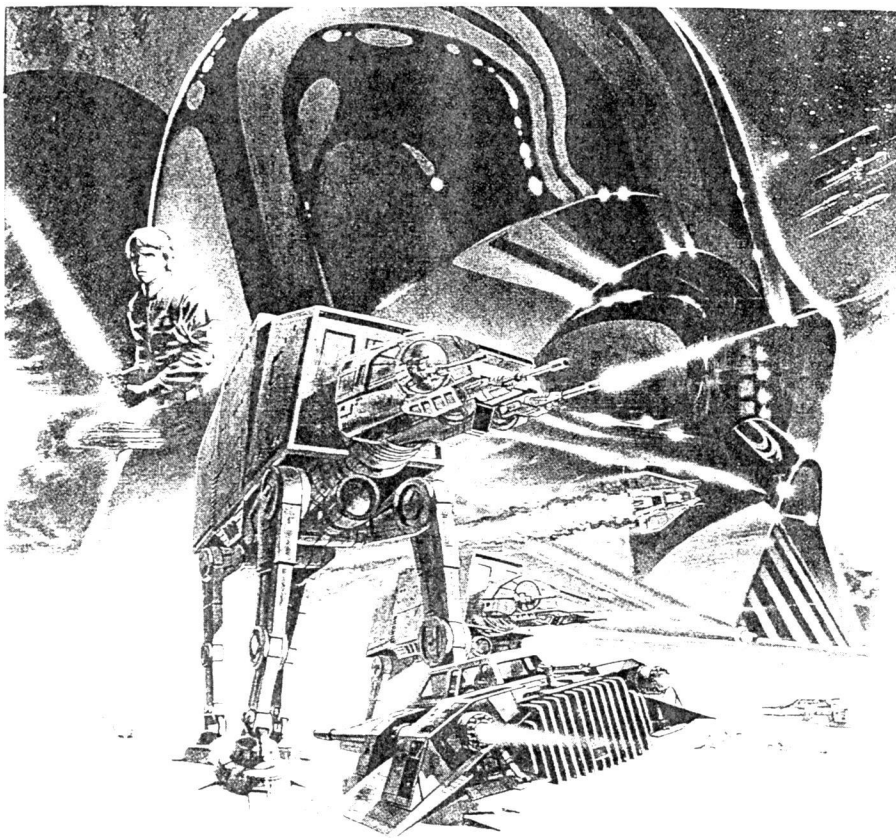
8 BIT USER

NEW ISSUE 1 **NEW**

DECEMBER 1997 - 90p

For users of the Spectrum and CPC

MAY THE FORCE



BE WITH YOU!

Inside this issue:

Star Wars - the Empire Strikes Back reviewed,
CP/M addresses, CPC History,
Classic Spectrum hardware, Speccy type-in,
Martyn Sherwood of Prism PD interviewed,
adverts and much much more!

GENERAL COMPUTING NEWS

NEW PSION

Psion have released their new Psion Series 5. It is set to rival the new palmtop windows CE machines. It has an optional 4mb or 8mb memory, has 16 shades of grey (which is the most that an LCD screen can get!) is 32-bit and is a RISC based computer. The new machine runs at 18 Mhz and I can't remember the processor that it uses! The bad thing about the machine is the fact that it is not compatible with files from the Series 3/3a/3c. Other good points about this machine is the fact that the screen is bigger (640x240 - I think!) and it has a better keyboard which has keys that feel and look like CPC keys. Expect to pay about £550 for the machine.

INTERNET PROVIDER

Behind the people at Software Generation in Liverpool, there is an internet provider. If you own/are thinking about starting a service and would like an internet page, contact North-West Internet at Software Generation on (Phone) 0151-709-1964 between 9am and 4pm. The person behind North-West Internet is Paul, so please give his name in if you're asked who you would like to speak to.

NEW PRISM PD CATALOGUE (*Spectrum tape/+D/+3/Disciple and +3 external 3.5 disc*)
After a lengthy wait, the new catalogue from Prism PD has been finished. This contains software from Fountain PD - which Prism took over after an attack by Alchemist Research on Fountain PD. The takeover means that Prism is now the largest library in the UK, possibly the world!

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the 8 BIT User staff. Nuff said!

Address: Leon Brown (Ed), 43 Gwydir Street, Toxteth, Liverpool L8 3TJ

THE EDITORS PAGE

Welcome to the first issue of Eight Bit User. We've had to get this issue released very quickly because I sent the original copy to Leon Bebbington about five months back to get it printed, but I never got anything back. The very kind Martyn Sherwood came to the rescue in August and agreed to help me with this issue. Sorry for the delay to those of you who sent me postal orders.

As I am resigning my position as PR manager & owner of Eight Bit Alliance, there will be another person to take charge of Eight Bit Alliance, so I leave our address out of this issue, as there should be somebody along next issue as our new PR manager. I'll still be the editor of the magazine, but I will not be carrying out anything important in Eight Bit Alliance except the 'Alliance Project', which was abandoned at one time. The computer is now hoped to be a RISC based computer instead of a CISC based computer and it is also hoped that Galaxy Software will write the OS and will put money into the project, depending if their Amiga software project is a success. We'll keep you in suspense about the title, but keep an eye on the Amiga Format cover discs/CDs.

As many of you don't know who I am, my name is Leon Brown. I am fifteen years old and own an Amstrad CPC 464, Amiga 1200 and Spectrum +2.

Must get the magazine finished,
Leon

Editor of 8 Bit User

Issue 1 vol 1 December 1997

NEXT ISSUE

In issue 2, we'll be explaining how the CPC and Spectrum can still take a portion of the market of the computer industry, but how Amstrad will not listen.

Oh! Also the usual things!

Acting Sub Editor speaks

Well! I never expected to be taking part in another computer magazine! For those who don't know me, I am Martyn Sherwood and the proprietor of Wallis Publishing. This comprises of Prism PD (supplying PD software for Spectrum, CPC and eventually, the Amiga), PD POWER - a bi-monthly 40 page magazine for Spectrum and Spectrum emulator users on the Amiga and PC, and new owner of the United Amstrad User Group - an 11 year old international CPC group.

If you are wondering what I've used to put this magazine together - I'll explain. I'm using an Amiga A1200 which has been expanded with an 030 accelerator card, an extra 32mb Fast RAM, 40mhz FPU, 1.3gb hard drive, Multisynch colour monitor, 4x CD ROM drive and I've used Wordworth v2. I could have used Professional Page 4.1 but I felt it would be quicker to use Wordworth since time was short.

Anyway, I hope you think the effort has been worth it. Most of the articles have been written by Galaxy Software, also myself and from other sources

Credit to Darren Randle of Relics magazine issue #1 for pages 8 & 9.

POPKEY

v1.0 © Ant

Purvis

Reviewed by Sandy
Redemske

POPKEY is copyright software. It may, however, be freely copied and distributed by all who wish to do so, on the condition that it is distributed in its complete unmodified form.

If you find POPKEY useful, a small donation (5 is suggested, but less will not be considered an insult!) would be appreciated and will encourage the author to write more useful utilities of this sort! Contact the author, *ANT PURVIS c/o BG SERVICES, 64 ROEBUCK ROAD, CHESSINGTON, SURREY, KT9 1JX.*

POPKEY is a pop-up keyboard display, for users of very old Spectrums with the paint worn off the keyboards, or newer Spectrums made by Amstrad which didn't have any paint to begin with. (Only in 48K mode though).

Each Spectrum key has it's own unique set of keywords, each of which are accessed using a combination of EXTENDED MODE and SYMBOL SHIFT keys. Without the paint on the keyboard telling you what key does which, it's easy to get lost. POPKEY solves that problem.

When POPKEY is activated, pressing CAPS SHIFT and ENTER will bring up a display of the Spectrum keyboard, complete with keywords. The display disappears again when you press another key. If you select EXTENDED MODE when the POPKEY display is on-screen, the display will remain while you type the whole line in. And that's all there is to it!

POPKEY occupies approximately 5K of memory at locations 60300 and above, so do not CLEAR above this address.

If at any time you wish to de-activate POPKEY simply key in:

"RANDOMIZE USR 65301"

as a direct statement or within a BASIC program. The 5K of memory that POPKEY resides in will then be available for use. If you key in

"NEW"

it will also un-install POPKEY. Keying

"RANDOMIZE USR 65281"

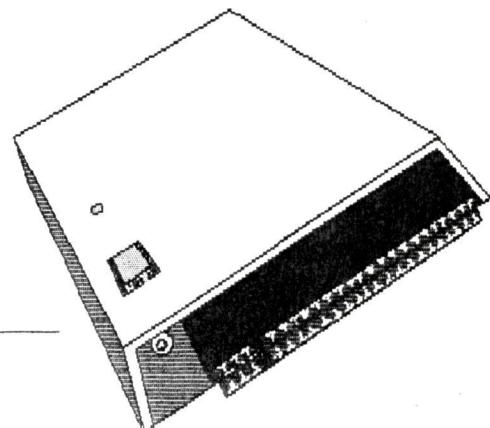
will re-activate, providing the memory space above 60300 has not been overwritten. ALWAYS de-install if you are mode switching.

POKEY can be obtained from Prism PD if you send a tape / +D disc and return postage (38p) and you will also receive our new catalogue.

To contact Prism PD write to Martyn at the following address:

13 Rodney Close, Bilton, Rugby CV22 7HJ

POPKEY - one of the most useful programming aides for users of the +D on +2 Spectrum machines.



This review is based on the CPC version, but most things will probably be the same on the Spectrum. As the CPC has a better sound chip than the Spectrum, the music on the CPC version will probably be a lot better. This is one of my favourite games for the CPC. The music is excellent and the playability is also quite good. The things that put the game down is the fact that the game only has four levels and that the graphics are vector graphic. It's because of the fact that this game only has four levels, that I completed the game on the first day that I got it. Bet none of you can beat that!

If you are a Star Wars fan, you'll probably recognise all four tunes. The first tune is the Star Wars tune that everybody knows. The tunes in the second , third and fourth levels are, to people who are not Star Wars fans, the more 'unrecognised' tunes from 'The Empire Strikes Back'.

The first level in the game places you on Luke Skywalker's Snowspeeder. You must stop the Probots from sending pictures of the Rebels' power generator to Darth Vader. When you have destroyed enough Probots you get a letter, in which you have to spell out 'JEDI'. When you have completed level 1, you then have to use Luke's Snowspeeder again to destroy AT-ST and AT-AT imperial walkers. You are given a limited number of tow cables, which you can fir at the legs of the AT-AT walkers. Yet again you get another letter if you kill enough of the imperial walkers. The third level is based in space. You control Han Solo's Millenium Falcon, in which you have to battle with the many tie fighters that are on your tail. As usual, if you destroy enough of the tie fighters, you'll get another letter to add to your collection. The final level keeps you in Han Solo's Millenium Falcon. Your ship is in an asteroid field and has no weapons. You have to avoid colliding with the asteroids. Each time you collide with an asteroid you lose a shield.

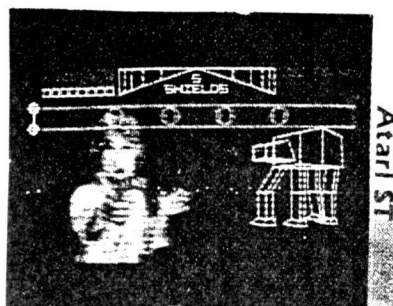
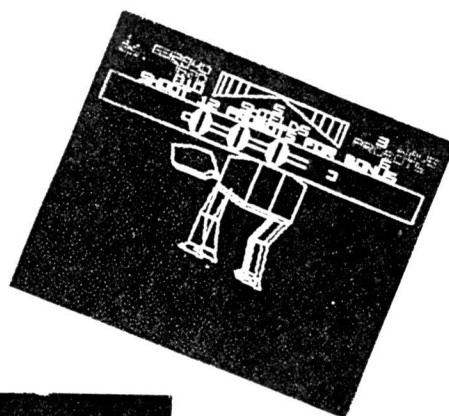
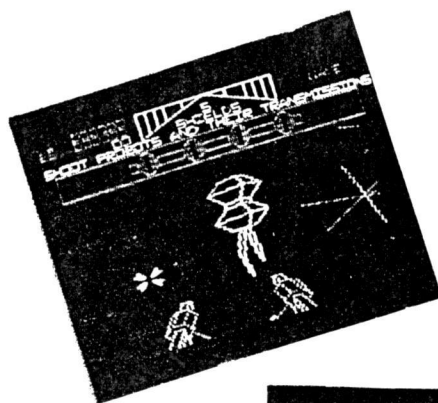
When you have completed the levels, Darth Vader gives you extra bonus points and if you have 'JEDI', you star the game again, but invinsible to all enemy probots for a limited amount of time.

COMMENTS

A lot of hard work has gone into this game, but it could have been improved by having more levels and better graphics.

THE SCORE

GRAPHICS	40%
SOUNDS	90%
PLAYABILITY	60%
TOTAL	70%



JUST BASIC

Many people in the CPC and Spectrum community, who shape and dictate the future of our most loved machines, are programmers. This section of the magazine is for those of you who would like to make your name as well known as a programmer. We have to say that Basic isn't the type of programming language that you'd use for arcade games, but it's good enough for programming adventure games, utilities and the like.

In this issue of Eight Bit User, we'll concentrate on the very basics of Basic. After a few issues, you'll find that you have enough knowledge to create a program that will give you your fame. Here is our listing for this month:

```
5 CLS
10 FOR R=1 TO 20
20 PRINT"I made this!"
30 NEXT R
RUN
```

If have never used Basic before, then you'll probably not have a clue what this means. Here is an explanation for each command:

5, 10, 20 and 30:

These are the line numbers. These tell the computer that the command should only be executed when the computer has been told to 'RUN' the program.

CLS:

This just means CLear Screen.

FOR <variable> =A TO B/NEXT

This tells the computer to assign the variable (In this case 'R') to a value (Which is represented as A) and add one to it until it gets 'TO B'. The next will tell the computer to add one to the variable and repeat what is between the FOR and NEXT commands (In this case; PRINT"I made this!").

PRINT:

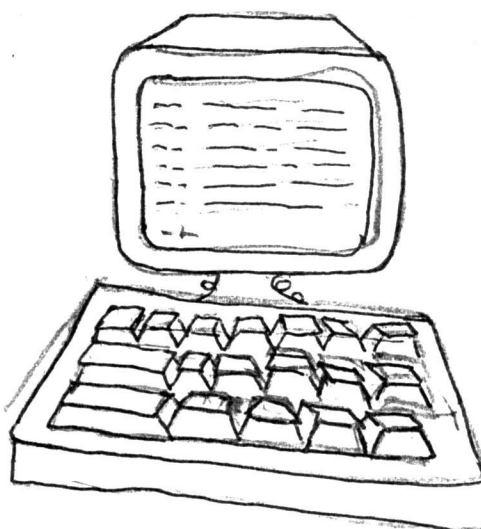
This tells the computer to print to the screen what is between the speech marks.

RUN

This tells the computer to RUN the program.

Next issue, we'll be explaining the FOR/NEXT commands in more detail and explaining about variables.

More next issue - Leon



EBA CLUB PAGE



**Phone Leon
on
0151
7289084
Between 7
& 9PM**

ADDRESS

**EBA
43
Gwydir
Street
Toxteth
Liverpool
L8 3TJ
enclose
an SAE**

**WATCHDOG-8
MEMBER**

Welcome to the first ever series of columns for 8 BIT User 8 BIT ALLIANCE. It's another amazing product sort of thing, from me, Leon Brown.

Some will recall reading in PD POWER about EBA starting a new project. The project is called ALLIANCE PROJECT and I'll be constructing a Z80 based computer called the Delta Nosius 3512 ©1997. The computer will be Spectrum and CPC compatible, come with K/OS (a new windows system) will be able to take its own software and lots more. We hope that the computer will have over 4000 colours.

EBA is programming a new quiz program for the Amstrad CPC & Sinclair ZX computers. It is planned to be the same as a normal puzzle book but with music and SFX. The program

**Latest news,
gossip with Leon**

will only be available to members of EBA.

One of our user group officers has finished programming a new art package for the Spectrum. It is called "Sketch Pad" and the price of this is £3. Postal Orders should be made payable to "J Devaal". The art program is loosely based on "The Artist II", but with its own look and features. For more details send an SAE to Galaxy Software at the EBA address.

When Alpha Maths Class is released (no date yet!) it will sell for £2 under the normal price for the first two months, then revert to the normal price. Now we go onto the news of the day from EBA:



NEWS

Galaxy Software may decide to create a new Windows system for the CPC and Spectrum called K/OS. Nothing is for sure but the windows system should be based on CP/M and should be very handy. Members of Eight Bit Alliance will receive a copy of Eight Bit User - our new style magazine. Please include your name and address. You can also send away for the free software that you get with the magazine, but you have to send us a tape. If you are using 3" or +D discs, then the software can be obtained from Martyn Sherwood at Prism PD. Hope you have enjoyed this article.
Bye!

**Please send an sae whenever you
make an enquiry to the EBA.**

**FOR CPC &
ZX SPECTRUM**

GHOST IN THE MACHINE!

The most important piece of hardware for Spectrum owners has naturally got to be the humble Speccy itself. But what went beyond the little black (or grey) box? Over the coming issues, Ghost in the machine will be taking a look at some of the hardware gadgets released over the years for our beloved Spectrum or CPC.

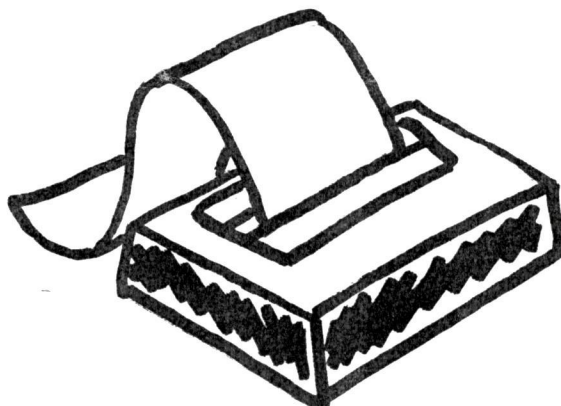
There has never been any shortage of little plug in's for the Spectrum. For a start there were those lovely little RAM packs for the ZX81. One of the most redeeming features of this said item was it's ability to drop out the expansion port when you least wanted it to, for example whilst playing Galaxians.



My ZX81 was fitted with a 4k RAM pack and this was just ample to play

Galaxians, but I lost count how many times the program crashed due to bashing away on the keys and disturbing the memory board.

The next box of tricks to surface was the ZX printer. Although the ZX81 only had 1k of memory, the printer still functioned well and was capable of some fairly decent results. The main draw back of using this was the paper (if you can call it paper, that is!). The thermal paper was fine for home use, but it was not the sort of thing you could use to apply for a job. Also the paper resembled something that would reside in the bathroom! Despite all of this many still use this little beast on their machines today. It's still ideal for obtaining print outs of program listings etc.



After all of that came the Spectrums. From the humble rubber keyed 48K job, the 48K+ with a proper keyboard (hurrah!), 128K+ then Amstrads' influence with the +2 and +3 range.

Then came the hoard of accessories for the more discerning owner. One of the most important development was the launch of the joystick interface. After all of these years, the kempston still reigns

supreme. Naturally, almost every hardware manufacturer was keen to jump on the joystick bandwagon. Take a look back to Crash, issue 66 July 1989. Five different items featuring Kempston compatibility were featured in the Datel Electronics advert. One of the best offers was the Kempston interface and the Quickshot 2 joystick. This cost just £13.99 complete and was a quality buy for all owners.

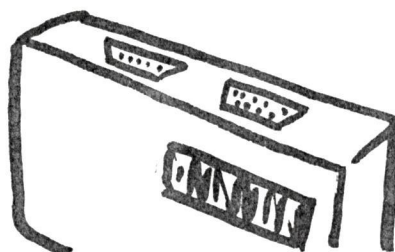


One of the main problems with the joystick interface was having to disconnect it when you wanted to use other hardware. The answer to this was to build in a Kempston compatible port into all new hardware. Again the previously mentioned advert featured these following goodies: Games Ace, Ramprint, Ram Turbo, Dual port interface. All these had the ability of using your joystick without swapping hardware.

Games ace (£10.99) allowed the user to output the sound from his Spectrum direct to the TV as opposed to through the Spectrum itself. This gave you the ability to actually hear the sound if you were using an old machine. Like the ad said, 'Ideal for early Spectrum`s with only a beep'.

The dual port (£8.99) speaks for itself really, two joystick ports in one interface. This provided the ability to play

simultaneous with two players, one using Kepston and one Cursor.



Ramprint (£34.99) was a printer interface with built in print drivers, a word processor, connecting cable for centronics printers and naturally the built-in Kempston interface. I know many people who use this and they all agree that the Ramprint was a superb piece of hardware and good value for money. Another bonus with Ramprint was being able to prove that the Spectrum could go beyond thermal printing and that it was capable of producing professional results.

The Ram Turbo (£22.99) value pack was another dual port interface. Again supporting both Kempston and Cursor, but also allowing the use of the Interface II. Other bonuses? The Quickshot 2 joystick and a free copy of Superpring.

The best bit was an expansion port to allow yet another add on. The Ram Turbo was also made available on its own priced at £14.99. Either way, a very worthy addition to your setup.

The joystick range was only part of the ever expanding hardware market.

Next issue we look at the more serious add on's such as the Genius Mouse, light pen and the Multiface.

8BIT

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALL
8BIT COMPUTER USERS

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Merline-Serve is a non-profit making service run by CPC enthusiasts, for CPC enthusiasts. We supply software and hardware no longer available from the commercial software houses and publishing companies. We stock many books, magazines, fanzines, ROMs, hardware, software (both games and utilities) on disc, tape and cartridge. Our items are in good working order, or your money back. We will consider swaps, part exchanges and purchases ourselves. If you can't get hold of a CPC item, then try us, because we have probably got what you want, can get hold of it or know someone who can.

We also run *King Arthur's Domain*, a disc based PD library containing over 200 discs. For a catalogue, send a disc (3" or 3.5") and an S.S.A.E. to the address above. Merline-Serve is now offering a standard 10% discount to all WACCI members. To get our latest catalogue, simply send an A5 S.S.A.E to the address above, and we'll get one on it's way.

AMSTRAD 464/6128

Amstrad GT65 Green Screen Monitors.....	£35.00
Amstrad 464 Tape Head Alignment Kits.....	£9.99
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Amstrad 464 New Circuit Boards Complete. Part No Z.70375.....	£14.99
Amstrad 464 Phazer Gun With 5 Games on Cassette.....	£9.99
Amstrad 6128 Phazer Gun with 5 Games on 3" Disk.....	£9.99
Action Cheat Mode Book (Cover Issues 17-50).....	£4.99
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Amstrad LP1 Light Pen for the 464 and Cassette Software.....	£14.99
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Amstrad 464 "Teach Yourself Basic" Tutorial Guide with 2 Cassettes Part 1.....	£9.99
Part 2.....	£9.99
Amstrad 464 Dust Cover-Mono.....	£6.99
Amstrad 464 Dust Cover-Colour.....	£6.99
Amstrad 6128 Dust Cover- Colour.....	£6.99
Amstrad 6128 Dust Cover-Mono.....	£6.99
Amstrad Action Magazine Binders (Holds 12 copies A.A.).....	£4.99
Amstrad-The Advanced OCP Art Studio-6128.....	£12.99
Amstrad 3" Ex. Software Disks -Pack of 10.....	£15.00
Three inch Head Cleaning kits.....	£4.99
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Amstrad 464+/6128+ manual.....	£14.99
Amstrad 6128+/464+ Keyboard Membranes.....	£12.99
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Above Cartridges are unboxed without instructions

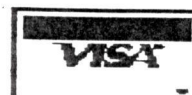
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INTERVIEW: by L Murray.

Sent in to CU AMIGA MAGAZINE, L
Murray has given permission for 8 Bit
User to carry this interview.

SUBJECT: Martyn Sherwood

Editor of PD POWER magazine. Probably the most
famous person in the cult Speccy & CPC scene.
Watch out Amiga users, he's coming your way!

Name: Martyn Sherwood

Age: 33

Born: London

Occupation: Running 2 eight bit user groups, now
focusing attention on the Amiga scene

LM: Where did your interest in computers come
from?

MS: It was while doing a graphic design course at
Loughborough College of Art & Design.
Computers were just coming in, although the CAD
packages were not very sophisticated then - but
still great fun.

LM: When did you start your 8 bit groups?

MS: In was 1992 and the Spectrum was nearing
the end of its commercial life. Your Sinclair was
still attracting over 25,000 readers and something
had to be done to offer support to those who
could not afford to upgrade. First of all I started
Prism PD, which has now become the biggest
Speccy PD library in the UK. In 1993 I started PD
POWER - the groups' magazine, after a series of
newsletters of the same name. In 1996 I became
editor of CPC User, run by the United Amstrad
User Group, then this year I was allowed to take
charge of it.

LM: How long have you been an Amiga user?

MS: Not as long as some people, although I've
always admired the Amiga. I bought an A500+
in 1992, and have loved it ever since. It is
basically my workhorse and I use programs like
Organiser, Wordworth 6, ProPage 4.1, and a few
others to run all the groups. I've since added a
high specs A1200.

LM: How do you rate the Amiga in today's

climate?

MS: I personally feel the Amiga is a wonderful
computer. At least there aren't over 10,000 bugs
as there is with Windows 95 on the Amiga OS.
The A1200 in my opinion is vastly under-rated -
but the new PowerPC cards by Phase 5 should
change the minds of some software developers.

LM: What are your immediate Amiga plans?

MS: Straight away we can offer support to Amiga
users running Spectrum emulators. We are in
contact with Area 51, who besides their own
Amiga products, can offer technical help with
emulators. In addition we have over 2000
Spectrum PD titles suitable for emulators - games,
demos etc. Check out PD POWER for reviews and
news on the cult Speccy scene.

LM: Long term, what do you hope to achieve?

MS: PD POWER will also have reviews of Amiga
PD from our own library being set up now. The
different aspect to it, is that only subscribers to
the club can access it. Cost wise, it only requires
people to send in their discs and return postage.
Why pay more?

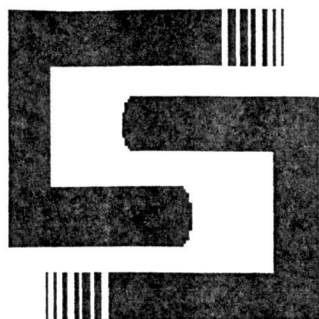
LM: I hear you are part of a new Amiga software
company. Is this true?

MS: The company in question is run by three lads
in Liverpool, who have come over from the
Spectrum/CPC market. They are using Blitz Basic
to produce new Amiga software. My role is to
provide art work and to promote the finished
article/company. The company, 'Galaxy Software'
is theirs and not mine!

LM: How do you see the future of the Amiga?

MS: The new cards by Phase 5 are the important
first steps, but the A1Box looks to be the
computer we have all dreamed about it. If people
want to enjoy the software that PC owners have
been privy to, then Gateway 2000 and Phase 5
should be supported 100%. This support over a
long period of time will lead to further products,
helping the Amiga recapture lost ground. Lets all
be positive - NOT negative. To coin a phrase, ITS
TIME TO DO!

For further details of PD POWER & Prism PD -
write to Martyn Sherwood at: Wallis Publishing,
Dept. 8B, 13 Rodney Close, Rugby CV22 7HJ. An
A5 38p SAE is required.



SOFTWARE ° HARDWARE ° DESIGN

Telephone/Fax: 0141 554 4735
Email: cam1@cix.compulink.co.uk

COMSOFT

10 McIntosh Crt., Wellpark, Glasgow, G31 2HW.
Scotland, UK

NIRVANA - ROM based file and disc management suite. Features include: disc copy, file copy, disc format, file copy, unerase, change file attributes, automatic catalogue of drive A and easy to use menu system. NOTE- only recognises data/system format in drive B. £15

MICRODESIGN PLUS - Menu driven DTP page processing package, Two discs/two manuals. For all CPC's with 128K. High quality printout. £29.99

DES - The Desktop Environment System. Sophisticated user interface based on Wimp systems. For all CPC's. Disc - £14.99, ROMS (2) £24.99

DESTEXT - Allows users of DES and Protect on ROM to run DES within Protect. Features include WYSIWYG. Disc £9.99

2in1 - Swap files between a CPC and a PC, with CPC running under CPM 3. £19.99.

PARADOS - Superb disc operating system for use with large B:Format drives. Compatible with and superior to ROMDOS. Use in slot 7 to free an extra slot for more software. £14.99

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MEMORY ADDRESSES OF AMSTRAD CP/M

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## CP/M 2.2 CP/M 3.1

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|----------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 1) Your CCP beginning address                            | 9700H | EE00H |
| 2) Your BDOS beginning address                           | 9F00H | F600H |
| 3) Your BDOS entry address/point                         | 9F06H | F606H |
| 4) Your CBIOS jump table/resident bios start             | AD00H | FC00H |
| 5) Your CBIOS warmboot entry point                       | AD03H | ????? |
| 6) Cold start routine address                            | C1B2H | 3D0CH |
| 7) Warm start routine address                            | C2BEH | FC7AH |
| 8) Console Status routine address                        | C2E1H | FDE2H |
| 9) Console Input routine (wait for char)                 | C2C3H | FDFAH |
| 10) Console Output routine address                       | C2C8H | FDC3H |
| 11) List device output routine address                   | C2DCH | FDBEH |
| 12) Punch device output routine address                  | C2D7H | FDB9H |
| 13) Reader device input routine address                  | C2DCH | FDF5H |
| 14) Home disk routine address                            | C2E9H | 3E74H |
| 15) Select disk routine address                          | C2F2H | FE06H |
| 16) The set track disk routine address                   | C524H | 3E77H |
| 17) The set sector disk routine address                  | C529H | 3E7CH |
| 18) The set DMA disk routine address                     | C51AH | 3E81H |
| 19) The read disk routine address                        | C2F7H | FE0BH |
| 20) The write disk routine address                       | C2FCH | FE10H |
| 21) List device status routine address                   | C2CDH | FDD0H |
| 22) Sector translate disk routine address                | C55AH | 3E8CH |
| 23) Stack Point                                          | 96F8H | F5F8H |
| 24) Heap Point                                           | 1DFCH | 1DFCH |
| 25) Common Memory starts at - in bank 0                  | ????? | C000H |
| 26) Banked system starts at bytes:                       | ????? | 0F00H |
| 27) The drive table address - in common memory           | ????? | FE2FH |
| 28) The disk parameter header - in bank 0                | ????? | 3F94H |
| 29) The allocation address of drive A - in common memory |       | BF1FH |
| 30) The disk parameter block for drive A                 | ????? | FF64H |
| 31) The device table address - in common memory          | ????? | FE16H |
| 32) The address of System Control Block - " "            | ????? | FB9CH |
| 33) USERF function - safer address to use is             | ????? | FC5AH |
| 34) Common Memory - safer address to use is              | ????? | CD00H |

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This table of CP/M addresses is intended for experienced CP/M programmers only. Hope it is of use to you. By courtesy of the United Amstrad User Group and CPC User.

this is your life.....



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We'll also look at the Coupe, C64, Spectrum, Amiga and then speculate what the future of computing might hold for us.

It is almost hard to believe how successful the CPC became during the 80's and early 90's considering the problems in making the computer and the dodgy advertising stunt to launch the CPC on April 11th 1984. But successful it became - and most of today's PC programming talent learnt their trade on the CPC.

The story begins in 1983, when by Easter of that year - the plans for the computer had been drawn up. The CPC was originally intended to be based on the 6502 chip just like the Commodore 64, BBC Micro and Apple. But by August, the team entrusted with the project had the makings of a poorly made micro - the screen map was in the middle of memory and the mono monitor had no shades of grey. One member left due to the problems

leaving the whole project in disarray.

By this point, Amstrad had already finished making the casing, the tooling, designed the keyboard and cassette mechanism. Amstrad turned to Ambit for a feasibility study - and turned to Roland Perry to head the rescue mission! Under strict guidelines Perry had a lucky break on August 10th. He visited a young company called Locomotive Software and because Locomotive already had a BASIC written for the Z80, the CPC was recreated. The Spectrum, Computers Lynx and other obscure Z80 based Micros were all on a level pegging with 6502 based Micros - therefore Amstrad opted for

Below: Clayton of Locomotive Software & Perry - CPC project manager



the Z80 since it would take too long for Locomotive to convert their Z80 BASIC to 6502.

Despite all parties being sworn to secrecy, one team member let it slip to an astonished competitor in January 84 that the project, had not only been started - but was also finished! The firmware was created by Bruce Godden who was hired by Locomotive. Ambit acted as a go-between with Locomotive and Amstrad at their insistence.

LYNCHED!

Roland Perry has never worn his 664 sweatshirt for fear of being lynched he joked! He said to Amstrad Action:

"We gave people exactly what they wanted, a computer with a disc drive in the same box. When it came out something went horribly wrong and everyone who bought one has cursed us ever since! I'm just totally perplexed."

New 664 owners felt cheated when the 6128 came out not long after the 664. Paying out twice was no joke.

The other man at Ambit - William Poel had the task of organising Software Houses to provide at least 20 games and 10 educational titles - as well as

the welcome tape and instruction manual. Of course, in order to produce the software, the heart of the computer had to be made.

Amazingly, the pcb was finished quite quickly and 50 were made by November, allowing the Software Houses plenty of time. These prototype pcb's were despatched by Sally Tyler, and for months would deliver them to various locations in the dead of night.

Roger Hurrey had the task of producing a Gate Array which was a discrete logic board. He created the Gate Array Simulator known as the 'GAS board' and was cheaper to make.

POWER UP!

Alan Sugar had the foresight to set up the official Amstrad User Group, and to launch the official magazine - Amstrad Computer User. Along with games and educational software, the perfect environment was created for the launch of a new computer.

It was planned that the prototype for the CPC would fly out to the factory on Monday January 23rd 1984, ready for mass production. Just prior to that weekend, it was found that the cursor keys did not respond to any key press. The fault was rectified over that weekend, and the prototype left Britain on schedule - but now you know

why you can input Basic anywhere on screen - all down to a minor fault!

By the end of 1989 five years after the CPC was introduced, it is reported that 2,000,000 CPC's had been purchased by the public. Certainly in 1988 the CPC sold better in the run up to Christmas than the previous year. In terms of hardware and software, the CPC constantly outsold the Atari and Commodore 64. Amstrad though didn't rest there. In May



1985 the disc based 664 was launched, only to be axed 6 months later after the appearance of the professional looking 6128. This caused a lot of backlash (see box out on previous page).

In 1989 the pcb of the 464 was redesigned with some 6128 components integrated onto a custom chip. Even with this modification, the 464 was far from perfect - tape software was slow to load up, and erratic as well.

The mid to late 1980's was the CPC's greatest years - software like Protext, Mini Office II, PrintMaster, Brunword Elite, Stop Press, Elite, Tracksuit Manager, Out Run, Echelon, Barbarian, Predator, Wec Le Mans, Star Glider - the list of classic 80's

CPC software is endless. But despite all this great software and hardware such as Rom boxes, ROM chips, graphics tablets, the multiface, light pen, Rombo digitizer and other add-ons, by 1990 the mood from developers had changed. New products were slow to appear (if at all) and the first writing on the wall was the closure of Amstrad Computer User in May 1992. Programmers defected to consoles and the PC - while the user found the Amiga 500 at £399 to be good value, compared to a £300 6128 with graphics that was beginning to look out of date.

Amstrad Attack magazine was so short lived we won't even go into it! But 1993 was the start of a new era called reality. Amstrad machines, add-ons and software were becoming available via second hand in droves, - either through magazines or car boots. The last batch of re-releases appeared, as a lament to the CPC's late Indian Summer. Amstrad Action started to rely on the enthusiast element, the influx of PD and re-releases. By 1995 it all proved too much and the last bastion in the CPC history disappeared. But fear not, for those who remain, groups like the UAUG, CPC Southwest, EBA, IEBA and the disczine producers will stay with you, cos we put value before money. Hurrah!

Martyn

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